Abraham Lincoln

In presenting to the public a facsimile of Abraham Lincoln's Autobiography, it is due to the memory of that great man, that a brief statement be made of the circumstances under which it was written. In the Autumn of 1858, during the celebrated discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr Lincoln, I had occasion to travel in the Middle and Eastern States, and finding there a laudable curiosity to learn something more of the latter than was then generally known, and looking too, to the possibilities of his becoming an available candidate for the Presidency in 1860, I applied to him for a brief history of his early life.

After repeated efforts on my part, in December 1859, he placed in my hands a manuscript, of which the following is a copy in facsimile, written with that freedom and unreserve which one friend would exercise in talking to another, and in which his peculiar conversational style is so happily set forth.

I need scarcely add that this simple unadorned statement of his was not intended for publication, but merely to give a few facts relating to his early history.

Normal, Illinois,
March 20th 1872.

Jesse W. Fell.

I was born Feb. 12. 1809. in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families, perhaps I should say— second families. My Mother, who died in my ~~fourth~~ tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and other in Macon counties, Illinois— My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 2, where, a year or two later, he was killed by indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest— His ancestor, who were quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania— An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite, than a similarity of christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like—

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age; and he grew up, literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year— We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union— It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals, still in the woods— There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "Readin, writin, and cipherin" ~~reading, writing, and Arithmetic~~ to the Rule of Three— If a straggler supposed to understand latin happened to sojourn in

the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizzard— There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much— Still somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the Rule of Three, but that was all— I have not been to school since— The little advance I now have upon this point of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity—

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty two— At twenty one I came to Illinois, and passed the first year in Macon County— Then I got to New Salem (at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I passed a year as a sort of clerk in a store— Then came the Black Hawk war, and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers— a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since— I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the Legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten— the only time I ever have been beaten by the people— The next, and three succeeding biennial elections, I was elected to the Legislature— I was not a candidate afterwards. During this Legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it— In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress— Was not a candidate for re-election— From 1849 to 1854, both

inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before - Always a whig in politics; and generally on the whig electoral ticket, making active campaigns - I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again - What I have done since then is pretty well known -

If any personal description of me is thought ~~desirable~~ desirable, it may be given, I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and grey eyes - no other marks or bands recollected -

Hon J. W. Fell.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

Washington, D.C. March 20. 1852

We the undersigned hereby certify that the foregoing statement is in the handwriting of Abraham Lincoln.

David Davis
Lyman Trumbull
Charles Sumner

Extract from a Speech of Mr Lincoln's delivered at Springfield June, 16th, 1858.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."

Extract from Mr Lincoln's last Inaugural, delivered 4th March, 1865.

"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God will that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil, shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.